

The Telegraph

Council could spend £18m evicting travellers

A Conservative-controlled council has voted to spend millions of pounds of public money evicting travellers from an unauthorised site.



The travellers site at Dale Farm, whose occupants have promised a 'great big gypsy war'

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Officials estimate that evicting more than 400 travellers from the former scrapyard near Basildon, Essex, could cost taxpayers £18 million.

Conservatives on Basildon Council insisted that planning laws had to be upheld and gave the green light despite opposition from Labour and Liberal Democrats.

The council was told that the Dale Farm site at Crays Hill – which is on greenbelt land – was occupied without planning permission in 2001 and had grown in the past decade.

Conservatives said all attempts to find alternative sites had failed and eviction orders had to be enforced.

Opponents said the council would be wasting millions and risk making elderly people and children homeless.

Several hundred members of the public – including travellers from the site – gathered to hear the debate.

Officials estimated that council costs could rise to £8 million and police costs nearly £10 million.

The meeting was told that attempts to secure funds from central government had failed.

Opponents said £8 million was a third of the council's annual budget and going ahead with the eviction could lead to staff losing jobs.

The council – which has had its plans for eviction approved by senior judges – has yet to announce when the clearance operation will start.

Police stood by outside a theatre where the debate was staged but the meeting ended without incident.

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